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## **OEFFA and Countryside Conservancy Partner to Help Farmers Scale Up and Expand Availability of Local Produce**

*Press Release*

[Countryside Conservancy](#) and the [Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association \(OEFFA\)](#) are partnering again to offer a variety of educational programming to specialty crop growers across the state of Ohio.

Building on a [2011 study](#) released by The Ohio State University's Center for Farmland Policy Innovation, the two-year project focuses on utilizing conventional distribution outlets, like grocery stores and restaurants, to increase the amount of local fruits and vegetables available to consumers, and create new market opportunities for specialty crop growers. While most local food systems advocacy and education has focused on direct-to-consumer sales at farmers' markets and through community supported agriculture (CSA) programs, almost 90 percent of food is purchased at retail outlets, such as grocery stores.

The project is funded by a grant from the Ohio Department of Agriculture, the State of Ohio, and the United States Department of Agriculture, under the provisions of the Specialty Crop Block Grant.

Beginning in January 2013, the collaboration will provide both business and production skills workshops and webinars that will help growers meet the challenge of diversifying their markets beyond direct-to-consumer outlets.

Additionally, OEFFA and Countryside Conservancy will work with regional distributors on developing best practices for working with small to medium-scale growers, with a focus on keeping farm identity in tact from field to final outlet. This will make it possible for grocery store customers, as well as restaurant diners, to feel connected to their farmers, a desire that has fueled the growth of the local and sustainable food movement.

As more information becomes available, including program dates and registration information, it will be posted to [www.cvcountryside.org](http://www.cvcountryside.org) and [www.oeffa.org](http://www.oeffa.org). Growers interested in receiving information on the upcoming workshop and webinar offerings are encouraged to visit these websites or contact Beth Knorr at Countryside Conservancy at (330) 657-2542 x 228 or Mike Anderson at OEFFA at (614) 421-2022 x 209. Chefs and grocers interested in sourcing local produce are also encouraged to contact OEFFA or Countryside Conservancy to learn how to participate in the project.

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#### ***About Countryside Conservancy***

[Countryside Conservancy](http://www.cvcountryside.org) advances the vision of a Northeast Ohio filled with thriving farming and food entrepreneurs: where farms are viable businesses, farmland is a treasured resource, and local food is commonplace. Countryside Conservancy supports up-and-coming farmers, share innovative land-use and business models, facilitate networking opportunities, and advocate community-based agriculture. They connect communities and farmers, provide alternate market choices, and create venues that foster civic engagement through fun and informal education. For more information, go to [www.cvcountryside.org](http://www.cvcountryside.org).

#### ***About OEFFA***

[The Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association \(OEFFA\)](http://www.oeffa.org) is a non-profit coalition of farmers, gardeners, consumers, retailers, researchers, and educators who share a desire to build a healthy, sustainable food system. Since 1979, OEFFA has used education, advocacy, and grassroots organizing to promote local and organic food systems, helping farmers and consumers reconnect and together build a sustainable food system, one meal at a time. For more information, go to [www.oeffa.org](http://www.oeffa.org).